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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2641
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000148

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ATTITUDE SURVEY REVEALS SINHALESE VIEWS
ON THE CONFLICT

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A Sri Lankan think tank, the Centre for Policy Alternatives, recently released a study intended to provide a measure of public confidence in the peace process and public opinion on resolving the conflict. This attitude survey provides valuable insight into the views of the majority Sinhalese community on the conflict and highlights some of the major differences in views among the various ethnic communities. All three communities agree that peace can be achieved through talks and that the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) is committed to talks. However, they also all agree that it is likely war will resume, and most Sinhalese support the GSL's increased emphasis on military action. The three ethnic groups are divided on whether the GSL has been doing a good job of protecting human rights and on whether Norway and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) have been effective at facilitating and monitoring the peace process. These findings make clear why the Sinhalese-dominated GSL has pursued a military-based strategy with little fear of disapproval by its constituency in the majority community.
End summary.

¶2. (U) The Centre for Policy Alternatives, a leading Sri Lankan think tank, recently released its Peace Confidence Index for November 2006. The study, based on polling of Sinhalese, Muslims and Up-Country Tamils (brought to Sri Lanka during British Colonial rule to work on tea plantations), is intended to provide a measure of public confidence in the peace process and public opinion on resolving the conflict. The study does not include the views of Sri Lanka's Tamil population in the North and East. The data was collected between October 23 and November 6, 2006. This poll provides valuable insight into the views of the majority Sinhalese community on the conflict and helps explain some of President Mahinda Rajapaksa's recent decisions and actions. The survey also highlights some of the major differences in views among the various ethnic groups.

Broad Support for Peace Talks

¶3. (U) According to the poll, all three communities agree that peace can be achieved through talks. A majority of Sinhalese say the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) is committed to finding peace through talks, and disagree that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) shares that commitment. The Muslim and Up-Country Tamil communities agree that the GSL is committed to peace talks, but the Up-Country Tamils also think the LTTE is committed to talks. Muslims are divided on the LTTE's commitment. A plurality of Sinhalese think that the LTTE is willing to participate in talks as a way to buy more time, while the other communities think they are committed to the peace process and are responding to international pressure.

Support for a Facilitator, but not Norway

¶4. (U) Just over 38 percent of Sinhalese think that only the GSL and the LTTE should be involved in talks, but another 32 percent think an international third party is essential and would have a positive impact on the peace process. However, two thirds of the Sinhalese disapprove of Norway's continued role as a facilitator. Twenty-one percent would like to see the U.S. as facilitator and another 19 percent say India would be the most suitable. Large majorities of the Up-Country Tamils and Muslims support Norway's efforts - but still would prefer India as facilitator. All three communities think that India's involvement in the peace process would have a positive impact. They also agree there should be separate Muslim representation at the talks. A plurality of Sinhalese think it important to include the

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Karuna faction (an LTTE breakaway group now working with the GSL) in future talks.

Most Anticipate War

¶5. (U) A majority of all three communities believe it is likely that war will resume. Most Sinhalese support GSL expansion of its military action "including even to all out war in order weaken the LTTE." Up-Country Tamils and Muslims do not support ramping up military action. A majority of Sinhalese stated that the Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) has not benefited the average citizen, while most Up-Country Tamils and Muslims do see the CFA as beneficial.

Sinhalese Suspicious of the SLMM

¶6. (U) The Sinhalese community is divided on whether a monitoring mission is essential for the CFA to succeed. Muslim and Up-Country Tamil communities think a monitoring mission is essential. Most Sinhalese think the SLMM has not been impartial in its monitoring of the cease-fire, while most Up-Country Tamils and Muslims think they have been impartial.

Support for UNP-SLFP Cooperation

¶7. (U) A majority of all three communities believe that the consensus between the United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) should have a positive impact on the peace process and the country at large. (Note: The sampling predates the current government move to get UNP members to "cross over," thereby endangering the MOU.)

Sinhalese Mostly Indifferent on the De-Merger

¶8. (U) A plurality of Sinhalese have no opinion on the de-merger of the North and Eastern Provinces, while most

Muslims oppose it and the Up-Country Tamils are divided. However, when asked specifically about a recent Supreme Court decision invalidating the merger, a plurality of Sinhalese thought the court's decision would have a positive impact on the peace process. A majority of Muslims and the overwhelming majority of Up-Country Tamils thought it would have a negative impact.

GSL: Passing Grade from Sinhalese on Human Rights

¶ 9. (U) A majority of Sinhalese think that the GSL has done enough to protect human rights, while the Up-Country Tamils think the GSL has not done enough and Muslims are divided on the issue. A majority of Sinhalese and Up-Country Tamils have no opinion on the President's call for a national commission to investigate human rights abuses, while most Muslims support it.

¶ 10. (C) COMMENT: The majority Sinhalese support GSL war efforts, even while claiming to believe in the peace process. Distrust of the LTTE probably leads the Sinhalese to conclude that talks alone are not enough. The Sinhalese public's view that the CFA has not been helpful makes it easy for the GSL to violate the CFA with little or no domestic criticism. The distrust of Norway and the SLMM and approval of the GSL's human rights record suggest that most Sinhalese believe what the GSL is telling them about the conflict and about the GSL's actions in the North and East. The Sinhalese majority is likely to distrust any facilitator that criticizes the GSL. This public confidence in the government's version of events means that the GSL faces little risk of losing support from its base in pursuing

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continued and ever-expanded military options.
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